

**Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on:**  
**House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023**  
**February 16, 2022**

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Heather Gates, President/CEO of Community Health Resources. CHR is one of Connecticut's largest and most comprehensive behavior health, housing, foster care, and primary care providers. We employ over 900 individuals throughout Ct.

I want to thank you for the 4% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) that you fought to include in last year's budget. It was critically important to helping us provide much needed salary increases for all of our staff. They have been on the front lines of the pandemic taking care of those most in need. I am here tonight to ask you to honor the long term plan to address the underfunding of behavioral health and housing services and increase it by an additional 8%. We are in desperate need of this funding to decrease the turnover rate of our staff and fill vacant positions.

Throughout the pandemic we have given our staff hazard pay, increased salaries by as much as 14%, and absorbed increased health insurance costs. We recently distributed raises to our staff and the gap between the funding received and the money we spent is \$730,000. In addition, inflation rose by almost 6% and this is having an impact as well. We need consistent and sustained funding from DOC and DOH to support our programs.

CHR provides extensive supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and a host of other housing supports. We work with individuals who are the most vulnerable and need extensive support to obtain and keep their housing. I am a member of the Reaching Home Campaign and know that safe, affordable, and permanent housing improves both economic and health outcomes and reduces long term expenditures. We support \$2.8 million to fund supportive services in the DMHAS budget to accompany new housing vouchers in the DOH budget.

CHR also operates methadone clinics in six Ct. prisons. This is an expansion of work begun a number of years ago in three settings and proven to be highly effective. It is essential that a COLA be applied to these contracts to provide for salary increases for nursing and clinical staff. The market for these positions has increased by as much as 15 – 20% in a 9 month period. We cannot compete with FQHCs and hospital systems for these staff if we are not adequately reimbursed.

We deeply appreciate all that you do to stand up for us in the budget process as do our staff and those whom we serve. We have been here every step of the way over the last two years need your help.